



PREHISTORIC AND POST HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF RAYAGADA DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of human civilization the status of people of Rayagada have left no evidence of their existence. History's have divided the earliest settlers of this district in two phases the Paleolithic and Neolithic. The glimpses of the above stated way of life is even now traceable from different tribal hamlets of Rayagada district. In the prehistoric days as per several survey has picked-up their own culture society. During the proto historic period Rayagada district was inhabited by non-Aryan races of people. The spirit of local autonomy with well marked political units and the isolationist spirit was maintained have although there was political catastrophes and kaleidoscopic changes such as the nature of the primitive inhabitants of this region even today, which is reflected in their day to day activities.

Rayagada During Pre-Historic Days:

Man is a Tool-using Animal and the record of Human History depicts the increased use of Tools in the conquest of Nature to make life more happy and comfortable. Human History is an account of the gradual progress from a Tool-less state to the present state of complicated machinery. The pre-History of Rayagada District is therefore a Record of the achievements of man from a Nude Nomadic wonderer to a civilized-thoughtful modern civic & scientific permanent settler with Human qualities.

The History of Rayagada District cannot be known and written where people have left no evidence of their existence. Only those inhabitants of this great land whose existence is known or traced out from some or other evidence or record should be dealt within the following pages Historians have divided the earliest settlers of Rayagada District into two phases the Paleolithic & Neolithic.

In the **Paleolithic age** (roughly from 5,00,000 years to 10,000 years ago) rude stone implements were used as weapons for hunting, cutting and boring. Such implements were usually made of stone pieces of hard rock called 'Quartzite'. They have been found in few places of Rayagada District such as Jaltar, Godgoda & Chatikona of Gunupur Sub-division and Sankesh of Rayagada Sub-Division. People were ignorant of any metals and they had no permanent homes during this period. The primitive inhabitants of Rayagada District led a Nomadic life, had made cave originated huts with tree branches and leaf. They lived on tree tops. They consumed the flesh of animals, fruits and Root-Herbs-Vegetables. They did not know the art of growing food through agriculture. The glimpses of the above stated way of life is even now traceable from different tribal hamlets of Rayagada District such as Jaltar, Puttasing, Sagada, Chatikona and Kasipur-Tikri where tree top Houses are used by the tribes such as Souras and Kondhos for different purposes. They too have the habit of raising stone boundaries around their houses. They still use some weapons and implements such as – two wooden sticks (one with a groove) to get fire, dried Bottle gourd for lifting water from brooks, cocoon of silk worm with two pieces of quartz stone and cotton to fetch fire, bamboo-joints with stone edges (in their local language it is called as Jhinka-meaning the puller) for tilling the valley fields in hand and many more. They used the technique of triggering heavy loads of stone on animals like wild Pig and Antelope to catch hold of them, such tool in local language is called as Pathara Phasa (Stone trick). They get oil from castor and mohuli seeds by pressing it with flat stone pieces with the help of tree Branches. Tribes of this district love to go on for animal hunting which is well depicted in their wall paintings. The chasing of animals to kill is locally called as 'Khedra' or 'Ghoda Benta'. Tribes of this locality use different types of tricky devices made of rope and stone locally called as 'Mita' (which is a Telugu word – meaning trick cage). These are perfect symptoms of stone age cultural developments of this District.

The **Late Paleolithic** period of Rayagada District comprised of two district cultures-the **Microlithic** and **Neolithic**. During the **Microlithic** age people of this region developed stone tools of very small size. They were hafted on wood and bone handles. People were still dependent on nature for food which they gathered from forest. During this time they improved in techniques of tool making which led to the invention of agriculture implements in the next period-the **Neolithic age**. Historian M.M. Ganguly's photos on different tools of this District speak of their **Microlithic** culture. These tools are of blade, burin, hoe, scrapers & lunettes. The survey made by Sri S.C. Nanda on the Paleolithic culture around J.K. Paper Mills of Rayagada District has brought to lime lightsome Neolithic artifacts like chisel, hand axe, chert & dolerite.

After the lapse of thousands of years man reached the **Neolithic age** (about 7,000

BC) when their weapons & implements underwent a change, still they were ignorant of any metals except Gold. Now their stone implements were polished, shaped and grooved. The use of stone paddy threshing & powder making tools belonging to this period are still sparsely used by the tribes of this District. It is known that stones tilling implements were found from the surroundings of Gudari, Chalakamba and Ukkamba villages of Gunupur Sub-Division though they are not available before the Histories for its study due to other reasons. Efforts are on to reach at the excavated tool of **New stone age** culture. During this period man of this district practiced agriculture & grew corn and fruits. Animals like cow, ox, goat, dog & the Buffalo were domesticated. Bows and Arrows were invented – The Arrow heads were tied with quartz stones having sharp edges acquired by chipping and polishing. They made pots by hand and later on by potter's wheel. Gradually burnt pottery came into use, which is evident from various places of this District. Painted and decorated pots have been unearthed at several places of Gunupur, Kolnara, Bissam cuttack, & K.Singpur blocks of this District. The people lived in cave like houses or huts, the walls of which were painted with the scenes of hunting and dancing. Isolated living was a common noticeable factor of the people and they had not entered into group life's during this period, though during the **Neolithic age** man of other parts of India led a settled life, lived in groups and started agriculture. They put their dead body in a large urn consisted of stone props in a circle supporting a massive stone roof. They had learnt the art of spinning and weaving cloth. At present over the area called as Jaltar, Puttasing, Sagada Panchayat of Gunupur Sub-Division inhabited by the Lanjia-Soura groups of Tribes, people still have their primitive system of weaving mechanism and dye making over it, which speaks the use of a refined and fine art by the above community. The same is attested among the Dangaria Kandhas of Bissam Cuttack and Muniguda Blocks of this District, though of a different kind.

Gradually man of this District came to learn the **Use of metals**. Like other parts of India they too at first used Gold but soon it was given up in favor of harder metals. Iron Age very soon succeeded all over South India, probably the Aryans first introduced it in India. The use of **Copper** or **Bronze** by the inhabitants of this area have not been known till now. The people of Rayagada District adopted the use of iron soon **after the new stone age**. This replaced the food gathering & hunting habits of the people by Agricultural life. Tools, weapons, & Implements were sparsely made of iron during this period. The earlier mentioned fire equipments made of wood & Quartz stone were tagged with iron pieces for triggering fire which is locally called as 'Nia Dunga' or fire Box. The hand tilling machine called 'Kadigi' and Ghinka got hard iron piece grooved into it replacing the hard piece of stone. Similarly ploughs pulled by bulls were added with iron edges in place of pieces of stones.

With the beginning of iron-age, the Historical period commenced when the Rigveda was composed. Though in the mid time there was a splendid example of the **copper age** civilization which flourished in the Indus valley that spread far & wide over the neighboring areas of North-West and South-West gradually, this area of present Rayagada District never witnessed such culture.

In the pre-Historic days, Rayagada District was inhabited by many Tribes who had their own culture & society. Though very little study is made on it, the survey made by Prof. Satyanarayan Ratha on the Vamsadhara River Basin has picked up some Paleolithic Artifacts. The study made by Sri A.K. Mishra of the geological survey of India, Bhubaneswar Branch, found out volcanic ash from Karini village on the left bank of Vamsadhara River, situated at about 18 kms from Gunupur town & 10 kms from Gumuda village. This volcanic Ash deposit is a high stretch of land measuring roughly about 20 meters wide, one hundred meters long & one meter height. Such deposits of volcanic ash are detected at sev-

eral nearby places of the same Karini village. This village originally was called Gopinath Pura Syasana. Similar volcanic Ash deposits are found near Ramanaguda village and Jaltar village (both are 20 kms away from Gunupur town in the North & South directions respectively). Such volcanic ash deposits are also traceable at places like Hati Pathara near Rayagada Town, J.K.Pur of Rayagada block and many places of Kolanara Block.

RAYAGADA DISTRICT DURING PROTO-HISTORIC DAYS

During the proto-Historic period Rayagada District was inhabited by Non-Aryan races of people. They were mostly proto-Austroloid and Proto-Afroloid or Negroid aboriginal population divided into two groups such as Kondhas and Souras, who formed majority of population of this District among other inhabitants. The present District of Rayagada was included under the Kalinga empire during the reign of Asoka the great in the 3rd Century B.C. In his separate Kalinga Edict-II, Asoka has described this geographical tract as 'Atavikas' which apply to the present Rayagada District and the greater Koraput Region. This is a hilly tract between river Languli & Prachi, identified as River Vamsadhara and Nagavali which form the Boundary of Rayagada District in the North and South direction respectively. In the 'Indica' of Megasthenes and 'Arthashastra' of Kautilya the Atavikas are referred as a furious race to have destroyed the Sumaha kingdom on the banks of River Krishna. Therefore Asoka wanted to deal with these newly conquered territory through his benevolent ways of administration. The same thing is well attested on the temple wall rock inscriptions of Mukhalingam (now in the Srikakulam District of A.P. State).

The Rayagada District witnessed the rich and varied pre and proto historic cultures in its ancient past, as in the case of many other primitive river valley cultures of other regions. As a good number of rivers flowed through its fertile hill tracts, the Rayagada District became the nestling ground of **new-stone age** man. A good number of **Neolithic** tools have been found from the river bed of Sankesh, which is situated only few kilometers away from the present Rayagada Township. Similar tools have been unearthed by Sri P.K. Chotroy, former Principal of Gunupur College, from a stream called 'God Goda' near Gunupur. From the **Neolithic** tools it is inferred that the primitive inhabitants of this region were leading a nomadic life at first with food gathering and Hunting habits of life for their survival. Later on they transformed into food producers and cultivated one of the primitive variety of 'Rice crop' known to Human civilization. At remote pockets of Rayagada District the Tribes and Non-Tribes vaguely cultivated a wild varieties of rice locally called as 'Kunda Dhana' or 'Para Dhana' or 'Kunda Rice' which can be produced on hill tops where water can only be expected through rain. The word 'Kunda' is derived from the Telugu word 'Konda' meaning mountain and so kunda rice is inferred as rice of mountains. Such varieties of rice are popular in this locality which are also known as 'Konda Surangi'. This variety of rice is said to have been the mother of all other types rice crops, even the oldest of it, found from china is said to have originated from this region.

Regarding this area very little historic reference is available till the reign of Chedi Ruler Kharavela in the 1st century B.C. The Hatigumpha inscription records this area as invincible Vidyadhara region who were defeated by Kharavela in his 4th regional year which boost the Kalinga empire under Kharavela.

The Rayagada District forms a part of Deccan plateau which in the pre-historic period was divided into many local regions by large rivers & their tributaries. Racial & Linguistic factor are responsible for the creation of such regions. The District developed into separate District unit retaining its individuality through the ages. The spirit of local autonomy with well-marked political units & the isolationist spirit was maintained here although there was political-catastrophes & kaleidoscopic changes – such is the nature of the primitive inhabitants of this region even today, which is well reflected in their day to day activities.